

Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE  
16 February 1988

NICARAGUAN COMPLIANCE  
WITH THE CENTRAL AMERICAN PEACE ACCORD

Summary

The Sandinistas, in our opinion, signed the Central American peace plan last August confident they would be able to meet or finesse its provisions without endangering their political control. Managua probably also calculated that the plan would help accomplish its main goal of dooming US support for the guerrillas. In the wake of the aid cut, Managua has taken a low profile and is unlikely to rescind the limited political concessions it has made during the past six months. The regime will probably step up military activity to wear down the rebels and deflect pressure for greater political latitude for dissidents. Although the Sandinistas may make additional gestures to buy time and keep the peace process alive, they are highly unlikely to agree to reforms that would jeopardize their grip on power. [REDACTED]

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We believe the Sandinistas' acceptance of the Central American peace plan last August reflected their concern about the rising political and economic costs of the insurgency. They probably saw the accord as an opportunity to deal a serious, if not fatal, setback to the prospects for continued US funding of the insurgents--a central goal of Sandinista foreign policy during the past five years. The Sandinistas quickly met peace plan provisions for naming a National Reconciliation Commission charged with monitoring compliance and for initiating a national dialogue with opposition parties. Additionally, the regime sought to improve its image by allowing the reopening of the independent newspaper La Prensa and the return of several exiled priests. Subsequently, in a reversal of long-standing regime policy, Managua agreed to open indirect cease-fire talks with the rebels and released some 1,000 political prisoners. [REDACTED]

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Following the Central American summit in mid-January, where President Ortega came under heavy criticism from the Presidents of the region's democratic states, Managua lifted its five-year-old state of emergency and promised to begin face-to-face cease-fire negotiations with the rebels. The Sandinistas clearly timed these moves to help sway the US Congressional vote on rebel aid. Two days before the vote, the Sandinistas also authorized 11 new independent radio newscasts and invited opposition parties, which had walked out of the national dialogue in December because of government footdragging, to resume talks. President Ortega's European trip in late January to solicit condemnations of US Central American policy also was timed in part to influence the vote. [REDACTED]

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Although the Sandinistas' moves have attracted significant international attention, we believe they are largely cosmetic. According to US Embassy officials, the regime continues to exercise tight control through existing public security laws. Opposition demonstrations, for example, still require police approval. Managua also has balked at discussing fundamental political reforms with dissidents and repeatedly has dismissed insurgent demands to expand cease-fire talks to include political issues. The regime continues to aid regional leftist groups while keeping a low profile to avoid detection. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the Sandinistas still train Salvadoran insurgents, allow them to operate communications bases inside Nicaragua, and supply them with some expendables, including ammunition and probably some arms. [REDACTED]

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\* See Annex for details on Sandinista compliance with the Central American peace plan.

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### Reaction to US Aid Cutoff

The Sandinistas have responded in a low-key manner to the US Congressional vote ending lethal aid to the insurgents. US Embassy reporting indicates Havana has counselled Managua not to gloat over the outcome in order to deny the United States any pretext for renewing rebel aid. Sandinista officials also have renewed calls for bilateral negotiations with Washington. [REDACTED]

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At home, the Sandinistas have continued to harass and intimidate the democratic opposition. Security officials recently threatened the life of a detained opposition leader, and proregime demonstrators violently broke up a human rights meeting in mid-January. The regime also used force to restore order following protests over forced military recruitment in Masaya in early February and has tried to discredit the opposition by saying some dissidents receive US funding. On the battlefield, the regime has concentrated its counterinsurgency efforts in the northwest, attempting to contain insurgent units in the Bocay Valley and restrict their use of the area as a logistics corridor in order to force them back into Honduras. [REDACTED]

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The democratic opposition appears hard-pressed to take advantage of growing popular dissatisfaction with the declining economy and the draft. The opposition remains plagued by disunity and lacks extensive grassroots organization. The regime's impressive security apparatus also has infiltrated most opposition parties and labor groups. [REDACTED]

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Ortega, while declaring that Nicaragua is already in full compliance with the peace plan, has demanded that the other Central American nations, especially Honduras and El Salvador, honor commitments under the accord. Managua probably calculates that increased pressure for on-site verification of the peace plan will further undermine support for the Nicaraguan insurgents and force Honduras to contemplate an accommodation. Ortega has demanded that President Duarte negotiate directly with the Salvadoran insurgents. Additionally, Managua continues to lobby the US Congress to limit the scope of humanitarian aid to the insurgents. Ortega has declared that humanitarian aid for the rebels would be acceptable only if it contributed to the relocation of those who lay down their arms and accept existing political institutions. [REDACTED]

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### Next Moves

The Sandinistas' guarded reaction to the aid cutoff suggests they will try to avoid provocative statements or acts that could generate new support in the United States for a renewal of lethal assistance to the insurgents. The regime probably will make additional cosmetic gestures, including releasing more political

prisoners and setting a date for municipal elections, to buy time to keep the peace process alive and to defeat the rebels on the battlefield. Managua also probably will continue to participate in cease-fire talks while holding to conditions that would spell virtual surrender by the rebels. [REDACTED]

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The government is likely to keep pressure on the opposition groups. Security officials probably will try to derail demonstrations by denying permits and hindering efforts to transport participants. The government-controlled media may intensify its smear campaign against opponents, and the security services are likely to use Sandinista-controlled mobs under the guise of spontaneous counterdemonstrations to break up opposition rallies. Additional detentions, especially of second-tier opponents who have little international visibility, also are likely. [REDACTED]

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In the military arena, Managua probably hopes that, by mounting regular sweep operations, it can regain the tactical initiative and force the guerrillas to expend scarce ammunition and supplies. It also probably hopes to force the bulk of the insurgents to seek refuge in Honduras. The Sandinistas most likely will try to demoralize the remaining rebels by keeping them on the move and mounting a psychological warfare campaign designed to convince them that their cause is hopeless. [REDACTED]

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## Nicaraguan Compliance with the Central American Peace Plan

### Democratization

#### *Compliance to Date:*

Nicaragua lifted the state of emergency on 18 January.

The opposition is permitted to meet indoors; outdoor marches and rallies are permitted with prior government approval.

The government permitted the opposition newspaper *La Prensa* to reopen and publish without censorship.

The Sandinistas permitted the Church radio station to reopen and—along with six other stations—to broadcast news programs without censorship. On 26 January, the government announced it would broaden press freedom allowing additional stations to broadcast news.

#### *Areas of Noncompliance:*

Nicaragua failed to lift all political restrictions by the date specified in the peace accord, 5 November. The Sandinista party newspaper accused the opposition of "abusing the political space" created by the peace agreement. In addition, in his statements to a labor group on 13 December, President Ortega indicated that the Sandinistas would not cede effective political power even if they were defeated in a free election.

The requirement that the opposition seek permission to hold marches and rallies 72 hours in advance violates reasonable standards for freedom of assembly.

The Nicaraguan regime continues to physically harass members of opposition groups. Examples include punitive application of military conscription against oppositionists, assaults by pro-Sandinista groups on protesting mothers of political prisoners, and the arrests of opposition leaders who recently met with the insurgents in Guatemala City. In mid-November, President Ortega publicly defended the activities of Sandinista counterdemonstrators, saying they were carefully controlled and had not killed anyone. Even after the lifting of the state of emergency, Sandinista activists smashed windows at the headquarters of the opposition umbrella organization on 22 January while police stood by.

The Sandinistas have actively encouraged a pro-regime faction to take over the Independent Liberal Party, the second largest opposition party in the National Assembly.

Two *La Prensa* employees have been briefly detained by the police and one reporter was beaten and warned against anti-regime reporting. The government has warned the newspaper on several recent occasions against publishing statements of insurgent leaders, a practice that contrasts with the ability of the guerrillas in El Salvador and Guatemala to publish guerrilla communiques in the press.

President Ortega announced on 18 November that he would not approve the request of private businessmen to open a television station—arguing that many West European countries had a monopoly.

The National Assembly repealed legislation allowing the seizure of property of those who have left the country for over six months. The government has invited all exiles to return.

The government has refused to restore property to exiles who return.

Nicaragua abolished the Anti-Somocista Popular Tribunals on 18 January.

Prisoners continue to be held incommunicado and in conditions which do not meet international standards, including recent accusations of torture. The government press has boasted that the end of the special tribunals will have little effect on processing those accused of counterrevolutionary activities. Moreover, justices on Nicaragua's Supreme Court recently resigned to protest government non-compliance with judicial orders.

The Sandinistas continue coercive pressures to join Sandinistas mass organizations, including labor and campesino groups.

Nicaragua continues to grant quasi-governmental functions to Sandinista mass organizations, especially the Sandinista Defense Committees.

Nicaragua says it refuses to consider ending the subordination of the Nicaraguan Army to the Sandinista Party.

## **National Reconciliation**

### ***Compliance to Date:***

Nicaragua was the first Central American country to form its National Reconciliation Commission. It also established local peace commissions in late September as part of its strategy to promote a partial cease-fire, split the insurgents, and coopt local Church leaders. The government initiated a national dialogue with opposition political parties on 5 October.

### ***Areas of Noncompliance:***

Nicaraguan national dialogue talks exclude major opposition business and labor groups. Fourteen of the fifteen opposition political parties boycotted the talks from 15 December–2 February to protest the Sandinista refusal to forward their joint proposal for constitutional amendments to the National Assembly. The Sandinista action will delay the implementation of amendments until at least early 1989—and probably later—since they must be approved in two consecutive legislative sessions.

## **Cease-Fire**

### ***Compliance to Date:***

Nicaragua proposed an 11-point cease-fire plan, 13 November, and the rebels introduced a counterproposal, 25 November. Cease-fire talks under the mediation of Cardinal Obando took place in Santo Domingo 3 and 21 December. Both sides agreed to a Christmas truce, 24-25 December, and each side accused the other of violating it. A third round of talks was held on 28-29 January in San Jose and new talks are scheduled for 18-20 February in Guatemala.

On 20 January, the Sandinistas proposed that an international commission guarantee political rights after a cease-fire.

### ***Areas of Noncompliance:***

The peace plan does not detail the specific obligations of the signatories, saying only that governments must carry out "all necessary actions" to achieve cease-fires permitted by their constitutions. The Presidents of the Central American democracies appeared to treat the Sandinistas' previous refusal to conduct direct talks with the insurgents, as noncompliance.

Nicaragua's unilateral invitations to Contradora and West European countries to verify Sandinista compliance circumvents an agreement at the January summit that the Central American Foreign Ministers would have principal responsibility in all verification matters.

**Amnesty*****Compliance to Date:***

Nicaragua released 985 political prisoners on 22 November. The government has said it will release all prisoners—including former National Guardsmen—upon a cease-fire. In the absence of a cease-fire, Nicaragua will release prisoners to foreign governments.

***Areas of Noncompliance:***

Nicaragua, unlike the democracies, has not released all political prisoners by the date specified in the peace accord. The Sandinistas also have not permitted international human rights groups access to State Security prisons. Democratic leaders have denounced Nicaragua's latest proposal, saying the concept of exile is incompatible with full amnesty.

**Arms Control*****Compliance to Date:***

Central American and Contadora representatives met in Caracas on 10 December and agreed to meet again in Panama in February.

***Areas of Noncompliance:***

Nicaraguan Defense Minister Ortega on 12 December confirmed Sandinista plans for a massive arms buildup, including a 600,000-man army. Although President Ortega later said the buildup was merely a proposal contingent on US actions, Costa Rican President Arias is quoted in the press as saying it is not "in the spirit" of the peace accord.

**SUBJECT: Nicaraguan Compliance with the  
Central American Peace Accord  
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